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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1246
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2373
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9395
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7650
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5428
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3810
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0014
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0214
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0168
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4477
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9956
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7203
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0209
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0096
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000083

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/// C A N C E L DRAFTING OFFICE WILL RESEND WITH NEW MRN AND MCN ///
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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2020

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY ON FONSEKA AND POST-ELECTION
DEVELOPMENTS

REF: COLOMBO 81

COLOMBO 00000083 001.4 OF 002

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

11. (S) SUMMARY: On February 2, Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa summoned DATT to a hasty meeting under the pretext of discussing an upcoming engagement activity with the U.S. military. As expected, Rajapaksa also wanted to explain the government's position on the treatment of General Fonseka following the January 26 presidential election. He did not mention a coup attempt, as had been charged in the media, but said Fonseka was planning violent reprisals against the Rajapaksas and their supporters if he had won. He claimed Fonseka his supporters had no reason to fear government reprisals but also warned there would be more transfers and compulsory retirements of officers who were seen as Fonseka supporters in the security forces. END SUMMARY.

LEGAL ACTION AGAINST FONSEKA

12. (S) Rajapaksa said the government would have to take legal action against Fonseka for illegal involvement in politics while still serving as Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) and for enticing serving officers to support his campaign for president. He stressed that unlike outrageous claims by regular political opponents, Fonseka's threats and betrayals had to be taken more seriously. He said the "white flag" accusation (that Rajapaksa had ordered the killing of surrendering LTTE leaders at the end of the war) was particularly egregious.

13. (S) The defense secretary said the government had to beef

up security after the election because it had become aware of Fonseka and JVP plans for violence. He said that many in government feared for their lives if Fonseka had won. "If you don't believe me, just ask the family of former Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda. They were afraid to come outside." Rajapaksa said he knew that Fonseka had deserters and ex-Army soldiers with him at his hotel and that was why he had sent additional security there. Nevertheless, Fonseka and his supporters had always been free to come and go from the hotel as they pleased.

HYSTERIA IN THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

14. (S) Rajapaksa accused Fonseka of manufacturing hysteria among the diplomatic corps, senior religious leaders and others by claiming the government wanted to harm him. He also accused Fonseka of inventing grievances as CDS in order to appeal to the opposition. The defense secretary claimed Fonseka and his supporters had no reason to fear government reprisals. He pointed out that there had been no reprisals carried out after the 2005 election, and there was no reason to expect such behavior now. At the same time, however, Rajapaksa warned there would be more transfers and compulsory retirements of officers who were seen as Fonseka supporters in the security forces (reftel).

DISCUSSIONS WITH RANIL WICKREMESINGHE

15. (S) Rajapaksa mentioned several conversations with UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. He had told Wickremesinghe that no one had anything to fear from the government, but that Fonseka was plotting violence. He said Ranil replied, "I don't know anything about that. That's all Fonseka and the JVP." Rajapaksa told Ranil, "You should have been the candidate. You would have got more votes." He said Ranil

COLOMBO 00000083 002.2 OF 002

was very reasonable, a professional politician, but a UNP-JVP alliance was unsustainable. The parties were diametrically opposed ideologically, and there was too much bad blood between those who remember the JVP insurrection against the UNP government of the late 1980s. But Rajapaksa cautioned the JVP was very dangerous. He said the JVP had played hell in the villages during the presidential campaign.

COMMENT

16. (S) Fonseka held a press conference yesterday and the opposition leadership with Fonseka met with the diplomatic corps today. The hasty summoning of Embassy DATT was an effort to get the Rajapaksa spin on developments. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa is not known as a moderate voice, and his remarks were emblematic of his downplaying government actions while exaggerating the opposition threat. It is interesting that he did not mention the allegation of coup plans by Fonseka, but his promise of more military purges to come was ominous. BUTENIS